



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF
CATHOLIC BISHOPS



RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM
WEEK

USCCB's "For the Good of All" Religious Freedom Week 2020

Lectionary Notes

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 28, 2020

Readings

Reading 1 – 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16A

Responsorial – Psalm 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19

Reading 2 – Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

Gospel – Matthew 10:37-42

The Meaning of Discipleship

- The first reading tells the story of Elisha's and a Shunammite woman's mutual service. The woman recognizes that Elisha is a man of God and a powerful prophet, and so she and her husband make space for him to stay in their home. Elisha in turn promises that the woman, who has no children and whose husband is advanced in years, will soon bear a son.
- One important aspect of Elisha's story is that he is, in a sense, the successor to Elijah. When Elijah calls, he must leave everything, including his livelihood and family, to follow. He offers up the remnants of his former life as a sacrifice to the Lord. When Elijah is taken up into heaven, Elisha receives a "double portion" of the grace that operated in Elijah. The Elisha stories reveal the theme, ever-present throughout Scripture, that discipleship entails giving up one's whole life in order to truly gain it.
- Both the reading from Romans and the gospel passage echo this theme. St. Paul teaches about what baptism means. This sacrament incorporates believers into the body of Christ; through it, the faithful have "died with Christ." And, since through his dying and rising from the dead Christ has overcome death, the faithful too emerge from the waters of baptism to live in Christ, freed from the power of sin and death. It is in this dying that we are brought to new life.
- Jesus presents the truth simply and powerfully: by losing one's life for Christ's sake, one finds it. It is in submitting our human wills totally and completely to the divine will, just as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane, that we are brought from death to life.

The Disciple as a Representative

- The story of Elisha and the Shunammite woman also shows another dynamic that Jesus describes in the gospel passage. Jesus teaches that, by receiving the disciple who is sent by Jesus, one receives Jesus himself. The idea here is that the missionary disciple serves as an emissary or representative of Christ. Therefore, Jesus recognizes that, by receiving the emissary, there is something like the beginnings of faith in the true God at work.

The Disciple as a Representative (*continued*)

- Jesus says that whoever receives a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. The woman recognizes that Elisha is a man of God, and so she receives him into her home. She shows him hospitality. Elisha acknowledges her good deed, and the Lord gives to her a son, thus helping to ensure that she will be cared for when her husband passes from this life. In this case, Elisha, the man of God, is a representative of the God of Israel; by showing hospitality and making even a small sacrifice, the Shunammite woman acts rightly towards the Lord and receives the gift of new life. In giving something up, namely, some space in her home, she received life in the place of death.
- For Catholics, this logic of representation is important. The servant of God is a representative of the Incarnate Lord. Certainly, this can mean that by caring for our clergy and religious, the lay faithful make an act of faith. On the other side, though, all of the baptized are representatives, for the entire Church is the body of Christ. It is the role of the lay faithful to represent the Lord in secular activities, so that the Church might bear witness to the kingdom of God in all spheres of life. This is what it means for the Church to be a "royal priesthood."

Missionary Disciples Who Serve the Good of All

- The Church, the body of Christ, bears witness to the kingdom of God in many ways. Catholics serve in areas such as adoption and foster care, education, and health care. We contribute to our country's political culture in a special way by recognizing the dignity of our fellow citizens through civil discourse.
- Religious freedom means that the Church has the space to carry out her mission to serve vulnerable people; it means that all people, of all faiths, are free to worship without fear of being attacked.
- We are also called to be in solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. We are called to bear the burdens of all members of the body of Christ. Therefore, it is imperative that we reflect on the lives of our fellow Christians, such as the Christians who suffer persecution in places like China or the Central African Republic, that we pray for them and for the conversion of their persecutors, and that we seek out ways to be in solidarity with them.